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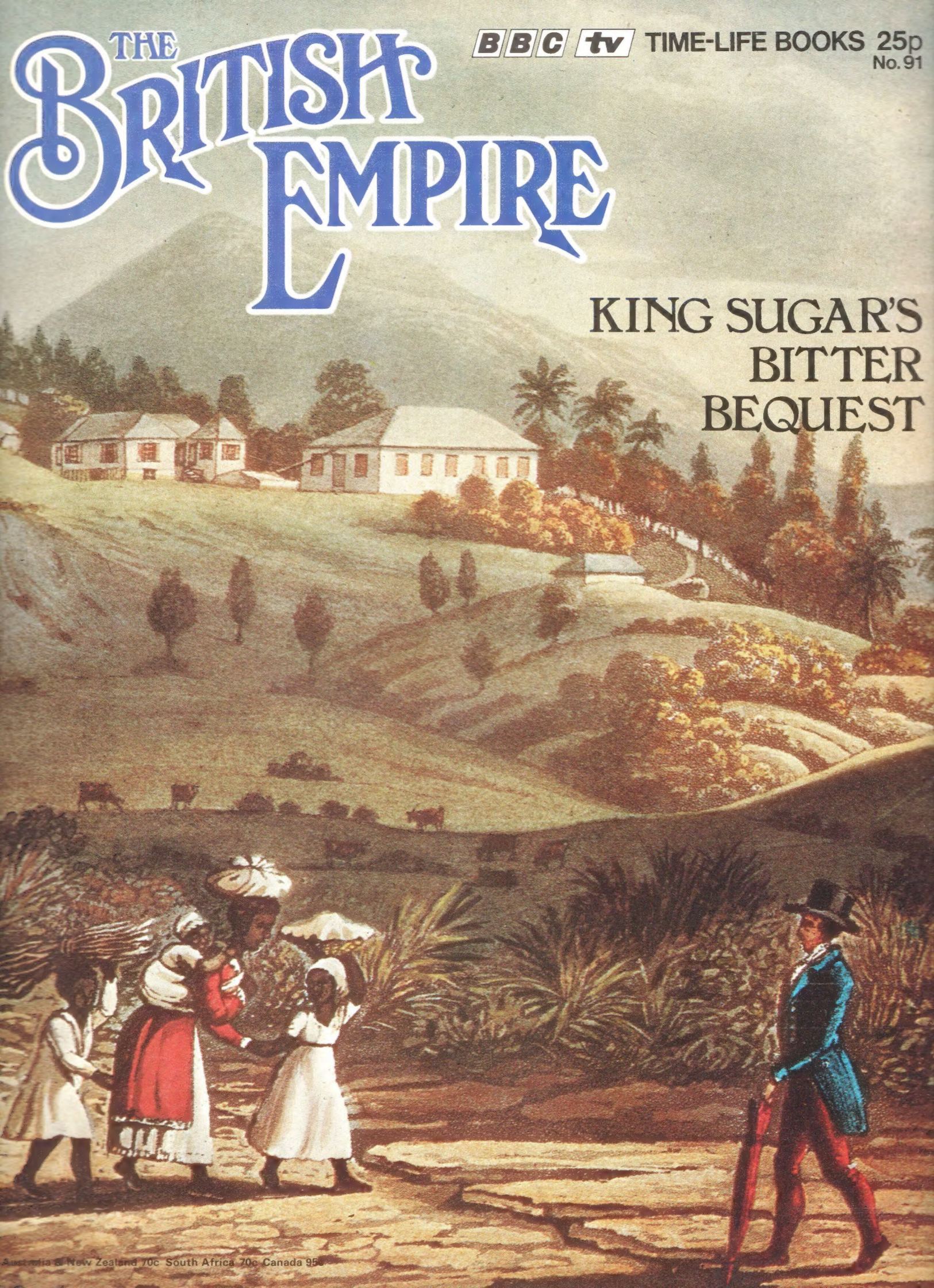
KING SUGAR'S BITTER BEQUEST



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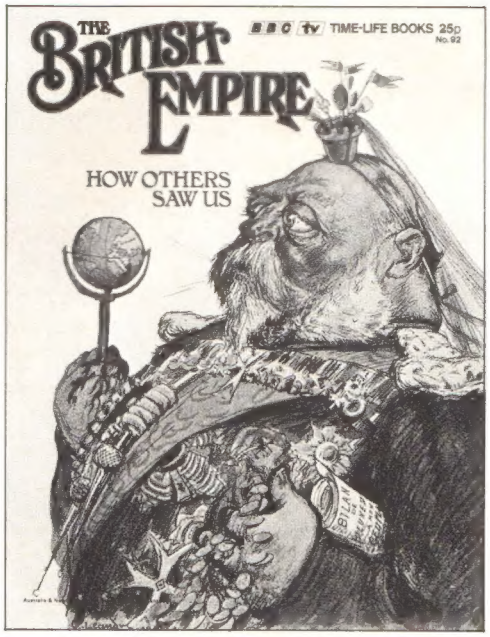

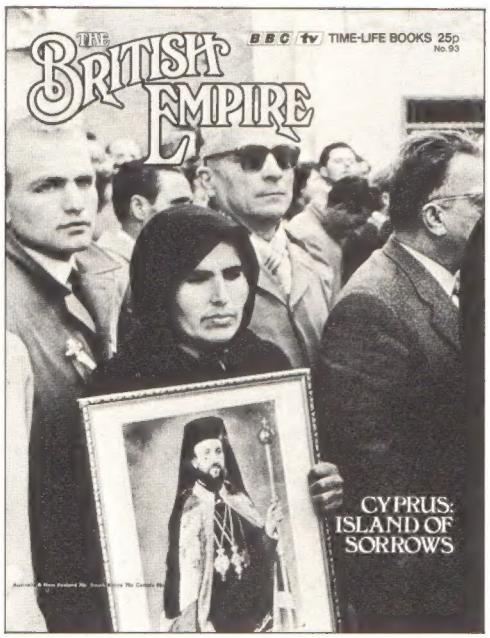

Cover: This early 19th-Century engraving shows a Mulatto house servant employed by a British sugar-planter in Antigua strolling nonchalantly past a heavily laden Negro woman and her children.

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KING SUGAR'S BITTER BEQUEST

No economy in the world – except in the aftermath of war – has ever faced so dramatic an upheaval as that in the Caribbean when slavery was abolished in 1833. Until then, the islands had grown rich chiefly on slave-grown sugar. A second stunning blow followed: in 1846, Parliament ended preferential tariffs for West Indies sugar. Faced now with stiff competition from foreign producers as well as with the loss of cheap labour, planters, reluctant to abandon the tropical paradise suggested by the 19th-Century vignette (below), tried to shore up their fortunes with imported Portuguese, Indian and Chinese workers. Many hard lessons had to be learned before the descendants of planters, slaves, and imported labourers, were able to create stable and harmonious multi-racial societies no longer keyed to sugar alone.

Just over 100 years ago a distinguished English author was leaning over the rail of the Royal Mail paddle-steamer, *Shannon*, as it dropped anchor outside the harbour of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, after its 15-day voyage out of Southampton. Fourteen years after the publication of his Caribbean adventure novel, *Westward Ho!*, Charles Kingsley was making his first visit to the region to spend Christmas, 1869, with his friend, Sir Arthur Gordon, Governor of Trinidad. The novelist watched the West Indians working in the coal barges that came out to refill the *Shannon*'s bunkers. One was worked by women, the other by near-naked men. That night the ship's band played and Kingsley was impressed by the contrast between the civilized dancing of his fellow-passengers and the savage mimicry of the coal-heavers in the barges. Long after the band closed the dancing with *Sir Roger de Coverley*, the passengers were kept awake by the talk and clatter of the coal-heavers, who frequently broke into song to revive their spirits through the long night.

Although the West Indians were less than two generations removed from slavery, Kingsley thought they looked healthier than many of the English working class. They were also sensitive about their freedom. Among the first words he heard at St. Thomas were those of a bumboatman to an English sailor who had asked the West Indian to cast off: "You call me black fellow? I mash your white face in!" Kingsley was not surprised by such behaviour. "Let it be," he wrote. "We white people bullied these black people quite enough for three hundred years to be able to allow them to play (for it is only that) at bullying us . . . we brought them here and we have no right to complain of our own work."

In fact, Kingsley had chosen a gloomy period in which to visit the area, for trade was at its lowest ebb. Many formerly prosperous estates lay abandoned, their old sugar works falling down, and in the dilapidated towns buildings were crumbling in disrepair and streets were unpaved, rubbish-strewn and unlit. A Christian Socialist by conviction, Kingsley was by nature also an optimist. When he wrote of his experiences in his little-known *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* – published in 1870 – he made a cautious prediction of prosperity. "Most cheering, too, and somewhat unexpected, were the facts we heard of the improving state of our West India Colonies, in which the tide of fortune seems to have turned at last, and the gallant race of planters and merchants, in spite of obstacle on obstacle, some of them unjust and undeserved, are winning their way back to prosperity. . . . All spoke of the emancipation of the slaves in Cuba (an event certain to come to pass ere long) as the only condition they require to put them on an equal footing with any producers whatsoever in the New World."

But Kingsley and the sugar-planters were mistaken, failing to see that the British West Indies could no longer compete with new areas of sugar-cane production in Cuba and Java and the subsidized beet-sugar industry in Europe which by then was beginning to make a serious impact. Nor could British West Indies sugar, long favoured by Britain's policy of preferring expensive colonial produce over cheaper products from elsewhere, survive under Free Trade. Imposed by British industrialists and their political friends to provide cheap raw materials for their profitable factories and cheap food for their low-paid factory labour, Free Trade began in 1846 and provided for the gradual elimination by 1857 of sugar preferences. It was known in the West Indies as "the great betrayal."

The indignation of the sugar-planters was understandable. At the end of the 18th Century, the younger Pitt estimated that of British incomes derived from abroad, no less than four-fifths came from the West Indies.

The first colonists had planted tobacco, using white labour, until the Dutch in Pernambuco, Brazil, introduced Barbados settlers to sugar-cane and provided African slaves for its cultivation. From 1640 onwards the English planters in the West Indies saw no reason to cultivate anything but sugar, except in Jamaica, where coffee became of secondary importance. Unwilling to consider any alternatives to either sugar or slavery, most of the planters found obvious scapegoats to blame for their dwindling prosperity after the Napoleonic Wars. Their scapegoats were the slavery abolitionists who tried in vain to convince the planters that slave labour itself was uneconomical. Britain had ended its slave-trade in 1807 and the Act "for the abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies" was passed in August, 1833. Affronted by Colonial office "interference" in their internal affairs and outraged by the idea of having to pay wages to their former slaves, the planters were unable to contain their fury. The reaction of Jamaica's House of Assembly was typical. The abolition of slavery, it declared, was "subversive of English law, threatening to the peace of this and our sister colonies, and dangerous to the integrity of the Empire."

Fonthill Abbey, Wilts., built from sugar profits amassed by William Beckford (right), was a monument to the wealth of the 18th-Century planters.

The planters also feared that emancipation would lead to violence and insurrection. Nothing of the kind happened. In Antigua, so far from there being trouble, the Christmas of 1833 was the first in 20 years when martial law was not imposed. "None of the most inveterate opponents of our recent measures," wrote Lord John Russell, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in 1840, "allege that the Negroes have turned robbers, or plunderers, or bloodthirsty insurgents. What appears . . . is that they have become shopkeepers, and petty traders, and hucksters, and small freeholders; a blessed change, which Providence has enabled us to accomplish." The supply of Negro labour available for work on the sugar plantations remained plentiful, but the planters insisted that the Negro, on whom they had depended when he was a slave, was useless to them as a free worker and sought other and more docile recruits.

William G. Sewell, a *New York Times* correspondent who visited the British West Indies in 1859 to study the effects of emancipation, was unstinting in his criticism of the planters. "While agricultural labour in all the British West Indies is the great *desideratum*," he wrote, "and the cry for immigration is echoed and re-echoed, it is amazing to see how the labour which the planter has within his reach is wasted and frittered away; how the particular population upon which the prosperity of the colonies so utterly depends is neglected; how, by mismanagement and unpardonable blunders of policy, the life of a field labourer has been made so distasteful to the peasant that the possession of half an acre, or the most meagre subsistence and independence, seem to him, in comparison with estate service, the very acme of luxurious enjoyment . . . every effort is made to check a spirit of independence, which in the African is counted a heinous crime, but in all other people is regarded as a lofty virtue, and the germ of national courage, enterprise, and progress."

Anxious to appease the planters, the British government loaned them money to finance the immigration of fresh labour and land prices were deliberately inflated in order to discourage the growth of a Negro peasantry. In 1865 a group of labourers in Jamaica faced with poverty, drought and unemployment, petitioned Queen Victoria for land which they could cultivate on a co-operative basis. The Queen's reply was a blatant and emphatic declaration of support for the planters. The petitioners were told that the prosperity of the labouring classes in Jamaica, as elsewhere, depended upon "their working for wages, not uncertainly, or capriciously, but steadily and continuously, at the times when their labour is wanted, and for so long as it is wanted. . . . And they may be assured that it is from their own industry and prudence, in availing themselves of the means of prospering that are before them, and not from any such schemes as have been suggested by them, that they must look for an improvement in their conditions."

Discontent mounted in Jamaica and in October, 1865, rioting broke out in Morant Bay leading to the deaths of 21 white and coloured persons and seven Negroes. The authorities reacted savagely; almost 600 men and women were killed, 600 were flogged and 1,000 houses were destroyed. Two months later, at the request of a very frightened Assembly, the British government made Jamaica, like Trinidad, a Crown Colony. The government also began to change its policy on independent land cultivation by Negroes and by the end of the 1860s small lots of Crown land were being sold to peasants at low prices in mainland British Guiana as well as in some of the islands of the Caribbean.

When great power rivalry for control of the Caribbean ended in the early 19th Century, the areas marked in red (left) were all parts of the British Empire.

DECLINING SPLENDOUR

Life was sweet for the West India planters at the peak of the 18th-Century sugar boom. Their homes were palatial, staffed by dozens of personal slaves. When their world collapsed, they clung stubbornly to the old grandeur, paying wages to blacks they once had owned, and trying futilely to develop alternate crops. But most, forced to sell their estates at colossal losses, were left only with their bitter-sweet memories.

Many freed slaves opted to remain on plantations like this one in St. John's, Antigua, living in the same sordid huts and toiling as hard as before, but compensated now with a little cash.

A military cemetery on St. Lucia (right) recalls the fierce battles waged for the island, which changed hands seven times before France ceded it to Britain in 1814.

A Faltering Society

The ending of preferential sugar tariffs gave the *coup de grâce* to West Indian prosperity in 1846, but the society was by then already faltering. It was flimsily based on unsound economics and on a constantly shifting community. Settlers never tried to make the islands self-supporting: they created products for Europe and imported all their living essentials from Europe. But the islands were no longer cornucopias and the planters had to pay for their neglect.

Most plantation owners were unable to adapt. It was a shock to discover how much hard work and attention would be required to keep the wealth flowing and few were willing to live full-time on their declining estates. They disliked the climate and missed the cultural richness and easy pleasures of Europe. So they put their property into the hands of managers who often farmed unwisely, rapidly impoverishing the soil, accumulating heavy losses and sometimes even cheating their masters outright.

After emancipation, missions (like the one shown on the right), formerly condemned by planters as breeding-grounds for subversive activity, gained fresh vigour and popularity.

Mulatto house servants, anxious to display their British style of dress, parade with umbrellas past black field hands on an estate in Antigua.

Heavily gunned ships set sail from Port Royal, Jamaica. With the end of sugar preference, such costly manœuvres soon made it apparent that the West Indies cost Britain more than they were worth.

Spanish Main to Limehouse

Memories of past grandeur haunted the plantocracy until well into the 19th Century. They looked back to the golden days at the beginning of the century when ships streamed into London's West India Docks, whose name briefly symbolized the Caribbean's thriving economy.

In 1799 Parliament had granted a monopoly to a private company to build and operate wharves devoted entirely to the West Indies trade. The company acquired a site on the Isle of Dogs at Limehouse Reach and in 1802, the West India Docks' first year, 374 ships discharged cargoes. For the next five years, some 500 vessels, filled with goods and slaves, sailed annually between Britain, Africa and the Spanish Main, returning home to crowd the wharf (right). But with the ending of the slave-trade and the decline of sugar, shippers demanded less expensive moorings and after 1821 the monopoly was not renewed.

Repairs, unloading and reloading all take place simultaneously so that ships can be turned round in the shortest time.

II. The New Slavery

In a series of long voyages which the abolitionists were quick to condemn as a revival of the infamous "Middle Passage," the planters were bringing indentured labourers from Madeira, India and China to work their sugar estates. It was an extension of the system which had started in the 17th Century with white indentured servants – indeed, a few thousand English and German immigrants were brought to Jamaica at this time.

Among the minority of West Indian administrators who opposed the mass importation of outside labour was Lord Elgin, Governor of Jamaica. He subsequently described it "a serious evil," based as it was on the view "that the system of husbandry pursued during slavery was alone suited to tropical cultivation. Its tendency therefore was to discourage agricultural improvement, and to retard the growth of that more intimate sympathy between the enlightened friends of the Planter and the Peasant which I was so desirous to promote." But the estate owners, unwilling to consider anything beyond their own immediate needs, were unconcerned with the long-term economic or social consequences of their policy. The first wave of immigrants came from Madeira. Between 1835 and 1882, 36,000 arrived in the West Indies, 30,000 of whom went to British Guiana. Unable to cope with the tropical environment, more than half of them died, but the survivors moved off the sugar estates as soon as they could, at first trudging the roads with packs on their backs, then opening shops.

In 1845 the Governor of British Guiana reported: "There is scarce a mile of road without a retail shop kept by them." By 1851 the Portuguese owned two-thirds of the rural and more than half of the Georgetown shops. By the turn of the century many were also moving into the Civil Service and the professions. But trade remained their main occupation and today, although they number only one per cent of Guyana's (formerly British Guiana) population, they include some of her wealthiest businessmen. The success of the Portuguese was their reward for intelligence, industry and thrift, though their improved status provoked occasional rioting among the Negroes. Undoubtedly, their light skins brought them preferential treatment from other European businessmen who were more inclined to advance credit to them than to the supposedly carefree and profligate Negroes. Yet it was not until the 1940s that the Portuguese were accepted socially by the white plantocracy. For a century they remained social misfits, hovering uneasily between the English social élite of British Guiana and the black and brown classes. Discrimination against them was due partly to their olive skins and to their Roman Catholicism, but above all to their closely knit, endogamous way of life.

The stream of Indian immigration was started by Sir John Gladstone – father of the Liberal statesman – an industrialist and absentee proprietor of several estates in Demerara and Jamaica. He secured Colonial Office permission to import Indian coolies into British Guiana on five-year contracts and in January, 1838, two ships left Calcutta with 414 Indians, of whom 396 survived the three-month voyage to the Caribbean. From then until 1917, when the government of India put an end to the practice, 239,000 Indians were brought over to British Guiana, 134,000 to Trinidad and St. Vincent and, after an uncertain start, 33,000 to Jamaica. Herded into insanitary barrack-like housing and forced to submit to the often ferocious discipline of plantation owners, overseers and policemen, the Indians were the victims of what critics aptly called "the new slavery." Sir Henry Alcazar, Mayor of Port-of-Spain, testified to a Royal Commission in 1895 that "with regard to its effects on the employer, the system is not very different from slavery, with the gaol substituted for the whip. And one of the worst consequences of Indian immigration in Trinidad has been to keep its educated classes at the moral level of slave owners."

At the end of their five-year contracts, the immigrants could exercise their option to be repatriated, though most decided to stay in the West Indies. Like the Portuguese, the Indians suffered high mortality, but the survivors established communities which today account for two per cent of the population in Jamaica, 35 per cent in Trinidad and more than 50 per cent in Guyana. About 90 per cent of these so-called "East Indians" came from the present-day republics of India and Bangladesh and were mainly Hindus. A small minority were Muslims. Visible signs of their influence are the mosques and Hindu temples that dot the roads of Guyana and Trinidad. Indian dress has largely disappeared, except for the *dhoti*, worn by some of the men on ceremonial occasions, and the head veils worn every day by many of the women. Gold nose ornaments are also to be seen and the red disc placed on foreheads to mark the season of Phaqwa.

The greatest Indian contribution to the Caribbean economy has been rice cultivation. Rice had already been introduced into the area when the Indians arrived, but they were responsible for the great expansion of rice cultivation in Guyana, where the value of exports exceeded £5,000,000 in 1970. Rice has become a daily food for all classes in the West Indies and enough is now produced in Guyana to satisfy the demand. Curry, too, has commended itself to West Indian palates, long reared on spiced pepperpot. The Indian contribution to the sugar economy – the main purpose of their prolonged migration – was also considerable. British West Indian sugar exports in 1895 were 21·9 per cent greater than in 1828. Exports from Trinidad in this period rose from 13,000 to 54,000 tons and British Guiana's increased from 40,000 to 101,000 tons. By contrast, exports from Jamaica, which was reluctant to finance immigration schemes, slumped from 72,000 to 19,546 tons.

Indian immigration brought undeniable benefits to the Caribbean, but also raised formidable problems. Thrifty, clannish and ambitious, the Indian contrasts strongly with the Negro. The Indian shows concern for past and future; the Negro is a strong individualist with more concern for the present. He accuses the Indian of avarice and is himself accused of vulgar ostentation and extravagance. When the basic distinctions of language, religion and occupation are also taken into account, the width of the great gulf fixed between Indian and Negro becomes apparent. In the 1950s there arose from its depths an eruption of racial hatred in British Guiana that eventually claimed over 200 lives. So irreconcilable did the

two communities become that some saw partition as the only solution. In other parts of the Caribbean, Afro-Indian tensions are much less acute. In Jamaica the Indians constitute only a small minority and have proved far more assimilable than their compatriots in Guyana. In Trinidad they form a large and separate community, but manage to live as good neighbours with the African majority.

After the Indians, the next addition to the ethnological laboratory of the Caribbean were the Chinese, who began to arrive from mainland China in the 1850s. In all, over 18,000 were brought over as indentured labourers. But, like the Portuguese, they left the cane-fields at the first opportunity to open market gardens and set up shops and laundries. During the 20th Century they have entered business, the professions and the Civil Service. They have also proved more assimilable than either the Indians or the Portuguese. Few now speak Chinese and most of them are Christian. Their greatest distinction, perhaps, has been to provide the first local governor-general of independent Trinidad and the first president of the republic of Guyana. But like other racial minorities, they have also been attacked by hooligan elements. The envious and the less successful have accused them of cheating, fraud, smuggling and arson, and in recent Test matches rioting has been sparked off as a result of unpopular decisions made by Chinese umpires.

By the end of the 19th Century the sugar-planters' attitude to peasant cultivation had hardened if anyting. Although Indian immigration was providing them with labour, they opposed any development designed to raise the status – and increase the independence – of the Negroes. The Royal Commission appointed to examine the economic troubles of the West Indies in 1897 reported that "no reform affords so good

Bridgetown, Barbados, once a powerhouse in the sugar empire, declined, as this 1893 scene shows, into little more than a sleepy village.

a prospect for the permanent welfare in the future of the West Indies as the settlement of the labouring population on the land as small peasant proprietors. . . . It must be recollected that the chief outside influence with which the Governments of certain colonies have to reckon are the representatives of the sugar estates, that these persons are sometimes not interested in anything but sugar, that the establishment of any other industry is often detrimental to their interests. . . . If a different policy had found favour the condition of the West Indies might have been much less serious than it is at present in view of the probable failure of the sugar industry."

In spite of many honest efforts to improve farm and factory efficiency, particularly in Barbados and British Guiana, the sugar industry continued to decline. In 1840 sugar had commanded a price of £48 a ton. In 1880 this was down to £20 10s. and by 1910 it had reached £11. Coffee, by now the planters' second crop, suffered a similar decline. The 19th Century was the era of development in the big countries: the American and Canadian West, Australia, New Zealand, South America and Africa. The little West Indian islands had been put in their proper place in the economic world.

But many planters were dogged enough to hold on. Even before emancipation some individuals, confined though they were by the narrow horizons of the sugar world, showed foresight in estate organization. Arriving in British Guiana from Liverpool in 1815, Josias Booker worked his way up to being an estate manager and then, with his brother George, began buying up derelict estates at rock-bottom prices. Josias actually experimented with alternative crops. In 1828 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Society of Arts for his adaptation of machinery to plantation work and was granted permission to experiment on government land "as a special favour and in consideration of his humane attention to his slaves by whom he appears to be honourably distinguished." Exceptional not only in his business acumen but in the encouragement he gave to missionaries, Josias and his brother founded the company which today produces 80 per cent of Guyana's sugar exports and controls some 30 subsidiaries with such success that the country became known in some irreverent circles as "Bookers' Guyana."

Despite the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the technology of sugar processing, there was little change in the cane-fields of the West Indies. Indeed, until very recently manual labour alone was used for harvesting the canes, and gangs worked much as they had done in the days of slavery. They went into the fields and cut the canes with machetes or cane-knives, headed by coloured "drivers" and supervised by white overseers – or "book-keepers" as they are still misleadingly called in Jamaica. It takes an exceedingly tough man to endure a day's work in the cane-fields under a fierce sun and few who can find alternative employment elect to do plantation work: hence the steady drift from the sugar estates by the Portuguese, the Chinese and many Africans and Indians.

For managerial staff, 20th-Century estate life was pleasant. Throughout most of the British Caribbean, the managers resided in great houses surrounded by lush gardens. In British Guiana they lived convivially together in centres modelled on the Army mess which so many of them had experienced in the First World War. During that war the disruption of European beet-sugar supplies brought a temporary boom to the West Indian cane-sugar industry and by 1920 the price of sugar had reached £58 a ton. But with the resumption of European production came the inevitable crash in the West Indies. Within a year the price of West Indian sugar had fallen to less than £10 a ton and many planters were ruined. Fortunately for the islanders, there were by now other sources of employment. The most important of these were the banana plantations, started in the 1870s. In 1869 Captain Lorenzo Baker had been sailing his Boston schooner back to New York from the Orinoco and had stopped off at Jamaica. Seeing bananas growing at Port Morant, he took a sample home with him.

Finding they sold well, Baker returned for more and persuaded peasant proprietors to cultivate them for him. From such beginnings grew the mighty banana empires of the Caribbean and Central America. Deliveries were uncertain until steamers replaced sailing-ships on the New York run in the 1880s and the introduction of refrigeration made large-scale development of a fruit trade possible. In 1899 the United Fruit Company appeared on the scene and rapidly became a symbol of the new age of huge private U.S. investment in the Caribbean. By 1941 the company controlled 65 per cent of the world's

The Caribbean's rich racial *mélange* included families like this one in Barbados, descended from the Irish deported by Cromwell in the 1650s, after he subdued their homeland.

Bewildered and frightened, these Indian children arrived in the islands as part of the indentured labour forces imported in the 19th Century to replace the freed slaves.

banana supply. At first the Jamaica planters dismissed banana cultivation as "a backwoods nigger business." By 1910, however, they had come to think otherwise, for by then banana exports were worth five times the value of their sugar exports. Meanwhile, the Jamaica banana industry had developed its distinctive feature: the high proportion of small farmers growing the fruit for export. Unlike sugar, it proved possible for smallholders to undertake banana cultivation. Elsewhere in the Caribbean, however, the banana industry followed the sugar industry in the establishment of large estates.

The banana-growers also inherited a single-crop mentality from the sugar-planters and when the banana bonanza began there was a tendency to drop all other crops in favour of fruit. In Jamaica itself sugar production rapidly fell away until by 1935 it accounted for only 15 per cent of the value of the island's exports compared to the 59 per cent from bananas. But plant disease and a shortage of shipping during the Second World War led to reduced banana production and since the end of the war sugar exports have been running at nearly three times the value of banana exports.

Long considered deficient in mineral wealth, the discovery of gold in British Guiana in the 1880s also heralded an apparently promising but short-lived alternative to sugar. Oil production, which started in Trinidad in 1911, proved a more enduring option and is now the source of 75 per cent of Trinidad's export value. In 1917 bauxite mining was started in British Guiana, but it was not until the Second World War that the mineral was also discovered by accident in Jamaica, now the world's foremost producer.

Economically, the most notable development in the Caribbean in the 20th Century has almost certainly been tourism. It began in the Bahamas when the first hotel was opened in Nassau in 1861 though holidaymakers were not attracted in significant numbers until cures for yellow fever and malaria were discovered at the end of the century. The enterprising Jamaica Exhibition of 1891 launched the first of many holiday advertising campaigns and by the 1930s Montego Bay was a well-known resort, though most American tourists preferred nearby Cuba Puerto Rico, Bermuda and the Bahamas It was after the Second World War, however, when both air travel and salaries expanded that the big tourist boom in the Caribbean began. In the last 20 years hotels have mushroomed everywhere and on some of the smaller islands tourism has become the chief money-spinner. In Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad it ranks among the leading two or three industries and in the British Virgin Islands and Bermuda it provides the sole income

THE FRUITS OF PROGRESS

Though cane has always remained a staple of the West Indian economy, the Sugar Islands, determined never again to depend on one single economic prop, have developed others. Three of these – cocoa, cotton, bananas – are of particularly high quality.

A mounted overseer supervises the cutting of the crop.

Cane from the field is loaded by derrick on to animal-drawn carts to be taken to the crushing plant. This 19th-Century means of transport is sometimes still used.

After the Second World War, vast fields of sugar-cane such as this were sustained in part by long-term contracts from the British government.

Ups and Downs of Cotton

In the 17th Century, cotton was second only to tobacco as the major export of the British West Indies. When both were displaced by sugar, with its high yield per acre and large profits, tobacco – in those days of indifferent quality – almost dwindled away completely.

Although it was of a long-stapled and excellent variety, cotton would no doubt have suffered the same fate if Britain had not become involved in war with France at exactly the time her textile industry was launched on a dramatic expansion. British manufacturers, cut off by hostile ships from their chief cotton source in the East, turned to the Caribbean, whose growers for a few years supplied 70 per cent of their needs. The brief flush of prosperity ended with the invention of the mechanical gin in 1794: expensive, hand-cleaned Caribbean cotton could not compete with the cheaper, machine-cleaned product of the United States.

Stimulated by international price rises during the First World War, growers in the Leewards and St. Vincent again planted cotton. Other islands followed and the industry, though small, has thrived ever since.

Cotton bolls are examined for staple length, picked over and cleaned.

The mechanical gin these women are using to separate the seeds from the fibres has changed very little since the 18th Century.

Many cotton-pickers pluck the bolls by hand just as their enslaved ancestors did, though growers are mechanizing the process.

Spreading the fibres to dry after they have been cleaned – essential because it twists them, making them easy to spin – is arduous, back-breaking labour.

Bales of cotton are loaded for export to the Royal Cotton Commission. The R.C.C. a war-time, British-government import monopoly, was disbanded in the late 1950s.

"Food for the Gods"

After the British captured Jamaica from Spain in 1655, they thought that cocoa might bring the island untold wealth, just as cane was already enriching Barbados. They could have been right, for the Spaniards had cultivated cocoa successfully enough in South America.

The Spaniards had learned about the cocoa beans – *Theobroma*, "food for the Gods," as it was named, after the Inca's term for it – when they slashed their way through South America in the early 16th Century. Having learned to improve the flavour of the drink by adding sugar, they kept the secret of the crop's cultivation for a century. Sir Dalby Thomas, the English historian, wrote in 1690 that the Conquistadors had prevented their black slaves from learning how to grow the bean, "lest it might teach them to set up for themselves, by being able to produce a commodity of such excellent use for the support of man's life." In fact, the spread of sugar simply made the crop uneconomical to grow until the late 19th Century.

Although Caribbean cocoa is not produced in bulk, it is, like the excellent local cotton, among the world's highest quality. Today, Grenada and Trinidad supply the needs of an international market.

A cluster of pods clings to a cocoa tree. The plant bears its fruit from old leaf-scars on the trunk of the tree and from larger branches.

These bags hold fruit of many trees: each tree bears only two pounds yearly.

A plantation worker uses a machete to slice through the tough wood hulls. His co-workers scoop out the seeds, from 25 to 50 per pod.

The Banana Bonanza

The Caribbean banana industry owes its origins to the Spaniards who brought the first plants over from the Canary Islands in the 16th Century. But the export trade did not begin until 1869, when an enterprising skipper, sailing from South America to New York, stopped in Jamaica and loaded aboard some bananas grown by small landowners. It had been only a few years since the Crown first permitted the sale of land to West Indian peasants. Now those who had suffered poverty for so long were presented with a rich and unexpected bonanza.

While other islands, still geared entirely to sugar, faced periods of hardship, Jamaica, turning more and more to bananas, prospered consistently until the Second World War, when shipments to the United Kingdom ceased. With resumed trade after the war, the Windwards also entered the market on a large scale. Though hurricanes, drought, a shortage of investment capital and the drift of labour into tourism over the past few years have seriously hampered production, bananas are still Jamaica's fourth money-earner (after bauxite, tourism and sugar) and the Windwards' second, after the prosperous tourist trade.

Bananas-and-cream was an unheard-of combination before 1923, when growers pushed it in an advertising campaign.

Overburdened mules like these on an early Caribbean banana plantation (right) have been superseded by mechanical transport.

III. The Nationalist Upsurge

The abolition of slavery and the decline of sugar also had profound and sometimes painful political consequences in the British Caribbean. At first, the imperial government in London saw no need to alter a political system which had developed long before emancipation. Planters and merchants had governed the region while slavery existed and they continued to govern it after their slaves had become freedmen. It was the missionaries, busily organizing the purchase and settlement of available land for the new freedmen who also undertook their rudimentary education and by 1838 they were reported to have more than 73,000 pupils enrolled in day and Sunday schools.

By the 1840s enlightened opinion in England was also beginning to stir against the iniquities of West Indian plantocracy. In a minute of September 15, 1841, James Stephen, Permanent Under-Secretary in the Colonial Office, urged that "the loudest yelps for liberty" uttered by the planters should be disregarded. "Popular Franchises in the hands of the Masters of a great Body of Slaves," he wrote, "were the worst instruments of tyranny which were ever yet forged for the oppression of mankind. What the Southern States of America are Jamaica was. If no Assembly had ever been established in the Island I doubt whether any wise man would create such an institution even now, when Slavery is extinct. For still there survive indelible natural distinctions and recollections which divide Society into Castes, and which must make the legislation of the European more or less unjust and oppressive towards the African race."

Britain finally grasped the full meaning of uninhibited planter rule at Morant Bay in 1865 and took immediate steps to prevent a repetition of that bloody lesson. The 200-year-old legislative assembly of Jamaica was prevailed on to pass a law abolishing itself – the only good law, according to the Speaker of the British House of Commons, that it had ever passed. "When there is no wide basis for constituent and representative power and responsibility to rest upon," wrote the Secretary of State for the Colonies, "there is no eligible alternative but to vest power and responsibility substantially in the Crown." Under financial pressure from Britain, the legislative assemblies of nine more of her 13 Caribbean colonies also voted themselves into liquidation during the next ten years and power and responsibility passed into the hands of governors. Only Bermuda, the Bahamas and Barbados remained in jealous possession of their assemblies.

In Barbados, despite racial and social divisions, a compact and reasonably harmonious society had evolved and when, in 1876, the British attempted to establish a federation of Barbados and the Windward Islands, both white and coloured Barbadians resisted it as a threat to their constitution. Conrad Reeves, a coloured lawyer who acted as the planters' spokesman, declared that federation "means, and can only mean, the surrender by us, in the long run, of our representative form of government which we have enjoyed for 250 years." After widespread rioting in Barbados, in which eight Negroes were killed, 30 injured and 410 arrested, the island's governor was transferred and the federation proposal dropped. And when, in 1966, Barbados received its independence, its 350-year-old assembly was still very much in existence.

In those places unwilling or unable to resist Crown colony rule, a governor wielded the powers of a benevolent dictator. He was assisted by a legislative council composed of two or three *ex-officio* members such as a chief secretary, financial secretary and attorney-general, some half a dozen nominated senior officials and an equal number of nominated unofficials – local business and professional men. The exact numbers varied from colony to colony, but the essence and purpose of the system was neatly summed up by a Royal Commission which inquired into the finances of Jamaica and some of the other islands in 1882. The Commission's conclusion was that "as the employers and employed will be generally speaking of different races, the Imperial Government will continue to have an ultimate responsibility in the administration of these islands, and must consequently retain an adequate proportion of direct power in the administration."

With the assemblies of reactionary and contentious planters out of the way, it proved possible to introduce many long-overdue reforms. In Jamaica, for example, under the eight-year governorship of Sir John Grant, the hand-picked Indian administrator who replaced Edward Eyre, the controversial Governor at the time of the Morant Bay disaster, many substantial improvements were made. Kingston replaced Spanish Town as the capital, local government, the police and judiciary were reorganized, irrigation schemes were started, and a medical service and public works department were founded. Less spectacular reforms were the introduction of small coinage, the setting up of a government savings bank and the disestablishment of the Anglican Church. Of more questionable value was Grant's attempt to get rid of the rats which infested the cane-fields. He introduced the mongoose from India but the creature proved to be a lethal enemy not only of rats and snakes but also of bright-plumaged birds and domestic poultry and it soon became as big a pest as the rats it had been brought over to eliminate. In spite of these depredations the little animal endeared itself to Jamaican hearts as the embodiment of sly cunning and the folk-song, *Run Mongoose*, was at one time almost a second National Anthem.

It was not until after the First World War that the coloured communities of the British Caribbean began seriously to question a political system that claimed to operate on their behalf yet had little to do with democracy and was unable even to secure racial equality in the Civil Service. Coloured middle-class agitation steadily gathered strength and in 1921 Major Edward Wood (later Lord Halifax) was dispatched by the Colonial Office to investigate the situation and make recommendations. His main proposal was that the legislative councils should be made more representative and to this proposal he added a prophetic warning: "The whole history of the African population of the West Indies inevitably drives them towards representative institutions fashioned after the British model. . . . We shall be wise if we avoid the mistake of endeavouring to withhold a concession ultimately inevitable until it has been robbed by delay of most of its usefulness and all of its grace." But the warning went unheeded and it was not until after

The Messiah of Caribbean Nationalism

Fidel Castro is by far the most potent political figure to emerge in the Caribbean since the black patriot, Toussaint L'Ouverture, established the republic of Haiti at the end of the 18th Century. Castro (seen here cutting sugar-cane) drew his strength from the same source as did the charismatic Haitian – the nationalist fervour latent in a repressed and poverty-stricken peasantry.

To L'Ouverture, the enemy was French colonialism: to Castro, it was "Yankee imperialism." For years American businessmen and politicians had given their support to corrupt and brutal régimes in Havana and when Castro and his guerrillas overthrew the Cuban dictator, General Fulgencio Batista, in December, 1958, a rift with the United States was inevitable.

Castro was determined to prove not only that Cuba could survive without American tourists, investment and export markets, but that it need no longer depend on sugar as the major source of wealth. He padlocked hotels, night-clubs and brothels and set up a Socialist system dedicated to modernizing and diversifying agriculture and to developing industrial skills and capacity. He seized private plantations – many owned by American companies, and even one that belonged to his own father – and distributed them among peasant co-operatives. But without a steady flow of earned income from the United States, the island was so hard-hit financially that Castro had to impose rationing. To pull himself out of the economic morass, he turned to the Soviet Union, who proved a willing benefactor.

The Americans, apprehensive at having Soviet influence so close to their shores, retaliated by backing a group of expatriate Cubans in a dismally ineffective invasion of the island in April, 1961. Six months later, the Americans took their revenge when President Kennedy forced the Russians to withdraw the nuclear missiles they had planted in Cuba. Castro quarrelled with the Soviet Union over this abject retreat and sought a new ally in Red China. It was a brief flirtation. The Chinese could neither buy what Castro wanted to sell nor supply what he needed to survive. So in 1966, he turned again to the Russians, making a trade deal that assured him of wheat, oil, fertilizers and essential machinery in exchange for sugar, minerals and tobacco. Castro's plans to update the Cuban economy placed him in a dilemma. In order to industrialize, he needed capital. But this he could accumulate only by falling back on the same old Caribbean devil – sugar. He set a goal of 10 million tons a year by 1969 – more than two and a half times the previous annual record. He almost met it, with eight and a half million tons. With this success, however, he turned Cuba back – at least temporarily – into almost total dependence on a single-crop economy.

Castro's other main objective was to spread the Socialist gospel to the rest of the Caribbean. "Today," he announced in 1966, "we are the only nation which has built, or is building, Socialism in Latin America, the only nation which has freed itself completely from imperialism. But we are sure that all the rest of the nations will follow that road. We are that banner and that banner will never be lowered." Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the Left-wing opposition leader in Guyana, has found inspiration in Castro's Cuba. So, too, did Dr. Salvador Allende, the late Marxist President of Chile, who once said: "The Cuban revolution is a national revolution, but it is also a revolution of the whole of Latin America. It has shown the way for the liberation of all our people." Che Guevara led his abortive guerrilla campaign in Bolivia on the strength of Castro's example. But so far, revolution has proved to be a less successful export than sugar. In his own realm, however, Castro seems more firmly entrenched than ever. Cuban living standards have improved, illiteracy is rapidly disappearing and new government-sponsored training centres are encouraging agrarian development.

The island has a one-party government and there are no democratic elections and no sign of any to come. Political arrests and even executions are not infrequent. There is no free speech and the only "news" that Cubans are permitted to read in their newspapers is carefully doctored to suit Fidel Castro's policy requirements and personal ambitions.

a prolonged period of strikes and riots erupted throughout the Caribbean in the 1930s, leaving 29 people dead and over 100 injured, that any real attempt was made to deal with the region's problems.

Wages were universally low, even in the booming Trinidad oil industry, and in depressed industries such as sugar and agriculture work itself was at a premium. In Jamaica, for example, nearly half the wage-earning population was only intermittently employed in 1935 and at least 11 per cent were without jobs at all. Unemployment in the West Indies was aggravated by the growth in population, which increased from 1,719,000 in 1896 to 2,514,000 by 1936. The food that most people could afford to buy was deficient and everywhere evidence of malnutrition abounded. An official report on the situation in Trinidad in 1937 noted that "a condition of lethargy pervaded the whole community, which was only broken on festive occasions or in times of disorder." This was hardly surprising since everyone on the island over the age of 20 was affected by deficiency diseases.

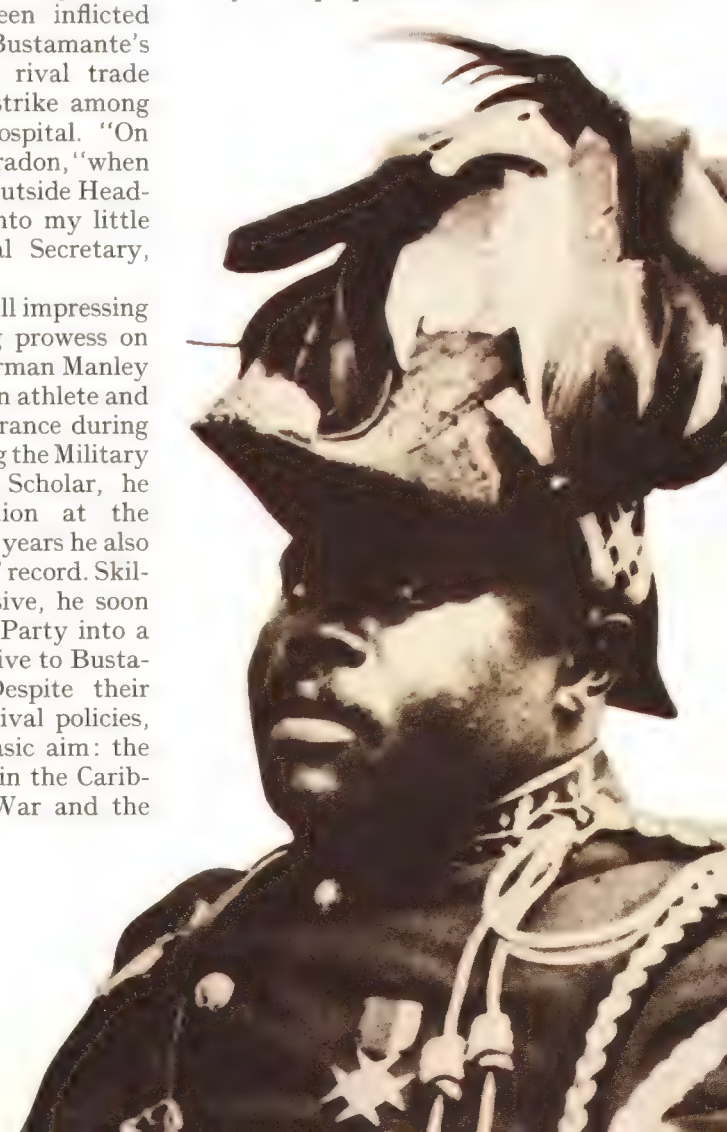
Poor sanitation and bad housing yielded their own rich crop of disease and suffering. Dwellings in Trinidad were reported to be "indescribable in their lack of elementary needs of decency" and accommodation on some of the sugar estates was found to be "in a state of extreme disrepair and thoroughly unhygienic." In such conditions, the infant mortality rate reached catastrophic proportions, ranging from 137 per 1,000 live births in Jamaica to 217 in Barbados. This compared with a rate of 58 in England.

After receiving the report of a Royal Commission under Lord Moyne in 1939, the British government pumped massive financial aid into its imperial territories in the Caribbean and sent in a staff of experts to inaugurate social reforms. But already the focus was shifting to other priorities. During the years of unrest a powerful and articulate labour movement had emerged and this increasingly concerned itself with political and constitutional reform. As early as 1938 a Congress of West Indies and British Guiana labour organizations had demanded legislatures elected by universal suffrage and – ironically, in view of what was to happen a generation later – regional federation.

New and dynamic political leaders also began to dominate the scene – men such as Grantley Adams of Barbados, Eric Williams of Trinidad, and Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley of Jamaica. Bustamante and Manley were cousins and in 1938 they joined forces to launch a new political movement. But they soon parted company and for the next 30 years Jamaica was to be their cockpit. Few political opponents in the West Indies – or elsewhere – were so different or so well matched. Bustamante (his name was originally Clarke but he preferred something more colourful) achieved prominence as a wild-eyed leader of the Jamaica dockers and sugar workers. After serving a short prison sentence during the Second World War, he set about organizing his own industrial trade union and founded the Jamaica Labour Party. An effective and powerful mob-orator, he often showed scant regard for the conventional niceties of public life. Lord Caradon, who as Sir Hugh Foot served as Governor of Jamaica from 1951 to 1957, has described Bustamante attending a meeting of the Executive Council for the first time with blood streaming from a head wound. This had been inflicted during a fight between Bustamante's waterfront workers and a rival trade union which had called a strike among the staff of the mental hospital. "On another occasion," writes Caradon, "when there had been a minor riot outside Headquarters House, he came into my little office when I was Colonial Secretary, swinging two revolvers."

While Bustamante was still impressing all-comers with his fighting prowess on the Jamaica waterfront, Norman Manley was achieving eminence as an athlete and lawyer. He had served in France during the First World War, winning the Military Medal. A former Rhodes Scholar, he gained increasing distinction at the Jamaican Bar and for many years he also held the Jamaican 100 yards' record. Skilful, diplomatic and persuasive, he soon built his People's National Party into a powerful Left-wing alternative to Bustamante's Labour Party. Despite their clashing personalities and rival policies, the two men shared one basic aim: the elimination of colonial rule in the Caribbean. The Second World War and the imperial government's resounding commitment to the cause of freedom had given impetus to nationalist aspirations in that region as it had elsewhere in the British Empire. When the war began, only a minority of West Indians enjoyed the right to vote: in 1944 universal suffrage came to Jamaica and spread rapidly to Britain's other Caribbean colonies. Responsible self-government was the next inevitable step and by the 1950s West Indian political leaders were looking even further ahead to complete and sovereign independence.

Britain raised no objections on principle but doubted the ability of some of the smaller territories to become politically and economically viable. The solution encouraged by Britain and enthusiastically taken up by many of the West Indian leaders themselves, including Norman Manley, was a political federation of the islands with British Guiana and British Honduras. The overcrowded islands were tempted by the prospect of emigration to the empty interiors of the two mainland territories. The prospect, however, was short-lived. Neither territory was prepared to receive a flood of



Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey was a passionate black nationalist with a love of extravagant uniforms. He dedicated himself in the 1920s to the fight for Negro rights and urged his followers to "forget the white gods." Demanding freedom for Africa, he promised that "Her redemption is coming like a storm." His movement soon collapsed, but his ideas still exert a powerful influence in America.

Labour organizer Alexander Bustamante became Jamaica's independent Prime Minister in 1962. Like many other radical colonial leaders, he was first jailed by the British and later given a knighthood.

immigrants who were mainly African in origin. Indeed, the "East Indians" of British Guiana were already locked in racial conflict with their African minority and were in no mood to support a scheme which would have meant them becoming a minority in an African-dominated federation. Following Jamaica's lead, the islands decided to go ahead without the mainland territories and the Federation of the West Indies came into existence in January, 1958, under the premiership of Sir Grantley Adams of Barbados.

But the refusal of the mainland territories to join the project robbed it of its main purpose and it was unable to survive the political and personal squabbling of its leaders. There was little fellow feeling between the smaller islands and the larger ones or between Jamaica and Trinidad. These two possessed over 80 per cent of the Federation's total land area, more than 70 per cent of its population and three-quarters of its wealth, yet remained separated from each other by 1,000 miles of water. Many in both islands also believed that their own economic and political progress was being held back by the poorer and less advanced territories, and in Jamaica Bustamante, the Leader of the Opposition, claimed that a common market would ruin Jamaica's industries. Prime Minister Manley felt obliged to hold a referendum on the issue and more than half of those voting registered their hostility to the Federation. Jamaica withdrew immediately from the Federation and her example was quickly followed by Trinidad. May 31, 1962, had been scheduled as the date on which the Federation would become a fully independent member of the Commonwealth. It became, instead, the date on which the Federation was officially dissolved. Three months later Jamaica and Trinidad-and-Tobago received their separate independence, leaving Britain to work out the future of the remaining island colonies.

An attempt was made to incorporate the other islands in a new federation but Barbados turned against the scheme and received separate independence in November, 1966. The remaining island dependencies were given an option of unitary statehood with Trinidad-and-Tobago, but Montserrat, the British Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the Cayman Islands elected to continue as colonies like Bermuda. Antigua-Barbuda, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenada preferred to become states "in association with Great Britain." This arrangement gives them internal self-government and can be terminated in favour of full independence at any time.

Continuing involvement with these islands, however, has raised problems for Britain. The secession of the Anguillans from the associated state of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla and their unilateral declaration of independence in 1969 almost sparked off a civil war in the eastern Caribbean and the entry of British troops and policemen provoked world-wide derision. The visit to London earlier this year of Grenada's Prime Minister to seek full independence led to widespread strikes among those Grenadians who fear the imposition of an authoritarian regime once ties with Britain are finally broken. Whatever Britain does she will find it difficult to escape criticism from one side or the other. The threat of secession by the islanders of Abaco also was withdrawn just before the Bahamas gained independence in July. The troublesome mainland colony of British Guiana achieved its independence as Guyana in 1966, but British Honduras, with self-government since 1964, has deferred its independence because of territorial claims made on it by the adjoining state of Guatemala.

Little therefore remains of Britain's Empire in the Caribbean. Its twin legacies – sugar and "East Indians" – are still evident, though sugar is no longer king and the "East Indians" long ago ceased being its slaves. In 1969 Dr. Eric Williams, the erudite Prime Minister of Trinidad, wrote about the realities of independence in the British Caribbean. His comments are still relevant. "We lack the tribal animosities of Nigeria or the religious passions of India or the economic difficulties of Ceylon or the political difficulties of Israel. By and large we have interracial harmony, disturbed at election periods, which many will envy. Indians are not repatriated as in Burma, Ceylon, Kenya [and now Uganda]. Our economic and social difficulties are not more formidable than those faced by other emerging countries. Our army is not a Latin American one. We have no Red Guards on the rampage." It is an unexciting but not inconsiderable tribute to a people reared on the twin brutalities of slavery and indentured labour.

Dr. Eric Williams, ardent nationalist and eminent historian, became Trinidad's Prime Minister at independence in 1962.

GUYANA: NEW NATION IN FERMENT

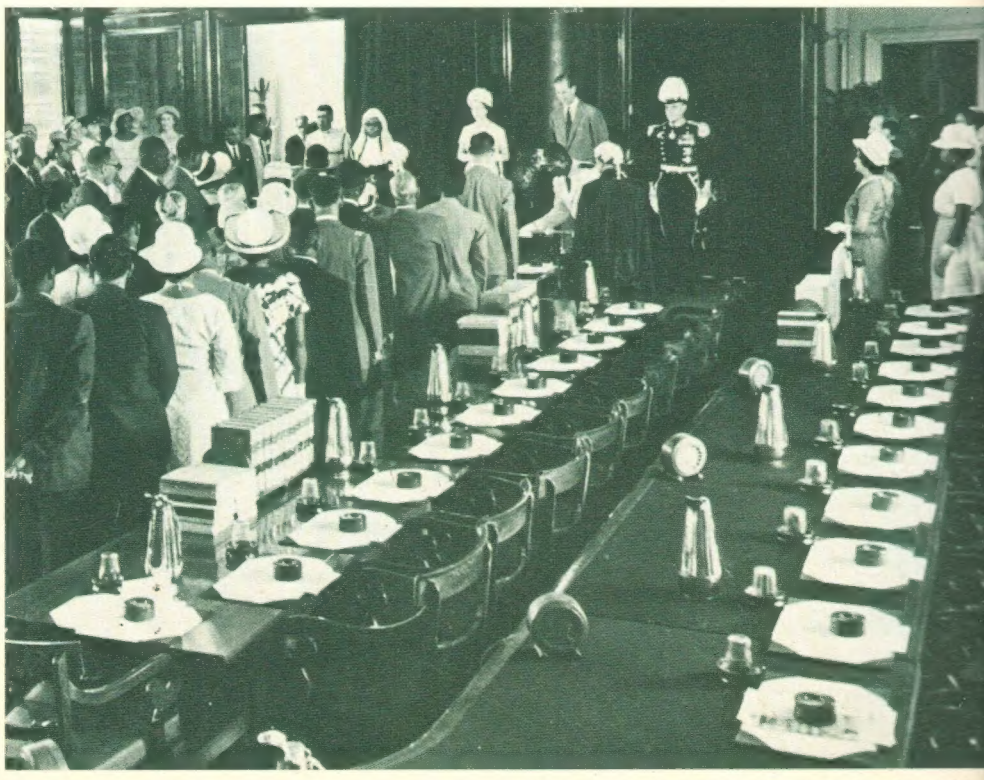
Internal conflict has plagued Guyana, formerly British Guiana, from the beginning of its fight for independence, which it achieved in 1966. Inheritor of the classic Caribbean problems of a deflated sugar industry and a mixed black and Asian community, it has endured financial crises and racial conflict. A visit by a Royal Commission in 1939 led to welfare and development grants. Even so, social and political tensions continued to grow and in 1953 Britain suspended the country's pre-independence constitution. The premier at the time was Dr. Cheddi Jagan, who is of Asian descent and has strong Communist sympathies. His chief rival is Forbes Burnham, Guyana's Negro Prime Minister. Burnham strives for closer identification with the other black leaders of the West Indies and welcomes black immigration to Guyana.

Lord Moyne (second from left) and other members of the 1939 Royal Commission arrive in British Guiana during their tour of the riot-torn West Indies.

Dr. Cheddi Jagan, British Guiana's ousted Left-wing premier, is arrested in 1954 for organizing an illegal demonstration against direct British rule in the colony.

Troop reinforcements march through the British Guiana capital of Georgetown in 1953 following violent clashes between Asians and Negroes.

Charred rubble is all that remains of a Georgetown commercial building which was set on fire by rioters protesting against Jagan when he was back in office in 1962.



The Queen and Prince Philip are welcomed to British Guiana's legislative chamber in 1966.

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The Duke of Kent hands over the formal instruments of independence to British Guiana's Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, on May 26, 1966.

Sergeant Major, The Hon. East India Company, 1830

Bill